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ABSTRACT

This study explores ways of helping fifth grade students edit their work appropriately for their grade level. The use of Daily Oral Language, grammar worksheets, or the reliance on the teacher to edit were eliminated. Instead, more direction for students was provided through the use of checklists, peer editing, and word processing on a computer. The students were also told to focus on writing for an authentic audience. At the conclusion of this 6-week action research, students were more successful in their editing. The new editing strategies greatly improved the accuracy of the students' editing. Includes a timeline; a nine-item bibliography; and eight references. Several self-editing and peer-editing worksheets are appended. (Author/PM)

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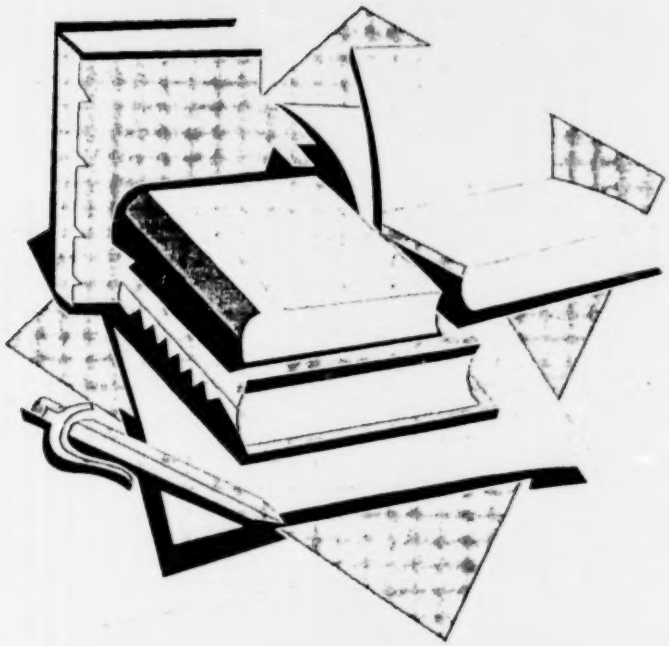
EXCELLENCE IN ELEMENTARY EDITING



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CS 512 327

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Abstract

Students in my upper elementary school classroom have had difficulty editing their writing. In this study, I explored ways to help my fifth grade students edit their writing appropriately for their grade level.

In order to help my students improve their editing skills, I did away with Daily Oral Language (DOL), grammar worksheets, and ended the practice of being my students' primary editor. New intervention strategies incorporated in my classroom were: providing more direction for my students through the use of checklists, peer-editing, word processing on the computer, and always writing for an authentic audience.

At the conclusion of my six-week action research, students were more successful in their editing. These new editing strategies made a huge difference in the accuracy of my students' editing. I am very pleased with this improvement and plan to continue using these editing strategies throughout the school year and into the future.

Timeline

July:

- Took one week class (720 Action Research)
- Determined my research problem (Improving student editing)
- Wrote my statement of the problem

August:

- Wrote my situating the problem
- Searched and found sources for my literature review

September:

- Wrote my literature review
- Constructed bibliography
- Wrote my intervention plan
- Determined baselines of my students
- Began implementing interventions based on literature

October:

- Finished interventions
- Retested original baselines
- Reflected on my interventions

November:

- Wrote my results of intervention
- Wrote my conclusion of study and future plans
- Wrote my abstract
- Completed appendix
- Self and peer-edited my action research paper

January:

- Action research paper was edited by Dr. Hankes
- Final revisions are completed

February & March:

- Action research paper was edited by Dr. Lemberger

Statement of the Problem

"What do I do now Mr. Mullen? I am all done editing my story." This is an inaccuracy that I have heard too often the past six years. It has been my experience as a regular education teacher that students in upper elementary school have difficulty editing their writing. In this study I explored new researched-based interventions to help my fifth grade students edit their writing appropriately for their grade level.

Situating the Problem

This is my seventh year of teaching upper elementary school. I have taught four years at fourth grade, one year at sixth grade, and this is my second year at fifth grade. The daily routine for my class prior to my research study always included a Daily Oral Language (DOL) activity. DOL is designed to help students learn weekly spelling and vocabulary words and further develop their editing skills. Each morning the students edited two sentences that I had written on the board prior to their arrival. Later in the morning, we discussed each sentence as a class. I then selected student volunteers to make a correction on the board until the sentence was edited correctly. Each morning my students enthusiastically embraced this process and virtually everyone eagerly volunteered to share with the class the corrections they had found in the sentences. I found my students to be very successful in this process.

Additionally, the Harcourt series always provided weekly grammar lessons for the students. I taught on a weekly basis a part of speech through a teacher directed lesson followed up with worksheets. The four weekly worksheets provided a heavy dose of the particular speech item that was the concentration of the week. The worksheets were very thorough but also quite dry and followed a similar format each week. Although my students generally did quite well on these worksheets, after a short period of time, they genuinely dreaded doing them.

The Harcourt series also provided weekly writing topics for my class. The Harcourt series had the students write several different styles of stories as well. My students generally found the writing topics engaging and enjoyed the variety of story styles that they had to write.

My students edited their own work initially whenever they produced a written piece in communicative Arts. In the past, I had given the students oral directions when editing by having them concentrate on finding errors in punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. They looked for these errors in the same manner in which they edited DOL each day. The hope was that they would carry over the lessons they had learned in grammar, and the editing skills they had developed in DOL, to their own writing pieces.

I never felt completely confident with this notion and always followed up my student's editing by working one-on-one with them to help them edit their papers. I always felt that my aid was required in order for my students to produce a quality final draft. However, I also felt that my students were too dependent on my services and not really developing editing skills of their own. In spite of this relatively heavy emphasis on editing, my students' editing success was limited. I knew that I needed to teach editing differently, but how?

Literature Review

What exactly is editing? "In its broadest sense editing can be taken to mean all of the decisions that are made about a piece of writing from its first conception in a rough draft through all types of shaping, changing, and expansion, to the final proof-reading of the finished copy" (Butler, 1981). Butler also stated, "The emphasis is recognizing the potential value of the writing and then deciding how it can be improved. Editing is modeled as a collaborative activity in which writer and co-editor work as a partnership with the joint aim of presenting the writer's ideas in their best possible form" (Butler, 1981). My favorite definition of editing is a rather simple premise but so very true. "The best stories are not written but rewritten" (Willis, 1997).

Throughout this study, I discovered a great deal of literature-based evidence that supports what I have always suspected, students do not learn to edit through isolated activities like grammar worksheets and DOL. Students are unable to carry over this information from their DOL notebook to their writing piece. They see the two as separate pieces with no relationship whatsoever. Clark (1987) recalled a story about a pupil that supports this point perfectly.

> "Yes I noticed something peculiar about her work. Alison would pass a grammar test on, say, subject-verb agreement, but would make mistakes in her writing. It was as if her study of grammar and mechanics was one thing and her writing another, and if the twain met, it was only by chance. For although sh was taught grammar intensively in that year, she was rarely asked to write. When we teach grammar outside the context of writing, we teach students how to hate English, not how to make meaning" (Clark, 1987).

Clark (1987) also wrote this about grammar lessons, "In some schools students are exposed to them [grammar lessons] year after year, but the lessons never sink in. That is why students from Yale and Harvard cannot explain the difference between active and passive voice. That is why a student is able to distinguish among "too," "to," and "two" on a state literacy test, but continues to write that her sister is "to noisy" (Clark, 1987). Because students cannot make the carry over from lessons to writing, Willis suggests, "Skills instruction should be embedded in students' writing. Drills in isolation don't carry over. Many teachers present short grammar lessons on common errors at the beginning of writing class. With this approach, the lesson is feeding back into the writing, which is where it matters" (Willis, 1997).

Prior to this study, I had doubts about the merits of editing my students' work. I never felt as though they were learning by having me take this role. I always felt as though I helped them to produce a final product without teaching them how to really produce a final product. My suspicions were proved true once again in my research. Clarke wrote this about teachers who take on this role in the editing process,

> "They correct all the students' mistakes in red ink. Students are not asked to try to undertake the corrections themselves or to rewrite the paper with the teacher's corrections as a guide. So students get complacent. They ignore the red markings or may not have the proficiency to understand them. The most important thing the student learns is tha someone else will correct the mistakes" (Clark, 1987).

Letting the students edit on their own is not easy for teachers to do. In fact, several colleagues frown upon teachers that do not go through a student's writing and fix everything. "Because I do not mark up students' papers in red, because I conduct conferences without turning every time to grammar, I am sometimes accused of having no standards or soft with writing instruction" (Clark, 1987). Teachers need to stick to their guns, however, and remember what Christensen writes, "Your primary function is to train students to become independent writers. The process is slow. Don't be discouraged if your first attempts are not 100% successful" (Christensen, 1982). Teaching students to edit their own work should be every teacher's ultimate goal.

To aid students in the editing of their own writing Christensen recommends, "Provide a checklist or other format to use as a basis for editing" (Christensen, 1982). Enz and Serafini agree that in order to help children learn how to assess and improve their writing, a simple writing checklist might be used (Enz & Serafini, 1995).

Erin Kohl, an elementary teacher from Sunset Elementary School, presented the idea of editing with different colors in one of my graduate classes this past summer. Kohl suggested that, "Editing with color encourages the child to focus in a specific skill while editing and assures the teacher that each child has actually done the editing."

Prior to this investigation, I was always skeptical of peer editing. Since my students had never been able to edit their own work, I did not see any merit in having them try to edit another student's writing. My review of literature, however, did not support this opinion. Willis wrote about the importance of peer editing when he wrote, "Writers in classrooms need sounding boards. Teachers should set up interactive classrooms where students are free and eager to consult one another. A writing classroom that's quiet is suspicious" (Willis, 1997). Christensen listed several benefits of peer editing in her writing such as:

1.Students learn style and organization by reading others' papers.
2. Students become more aware of audience and purpose for writing.
3. Students more readily accept and use peer criticism.
4. Students learn to identify specific errors and correct them.

5. Students try not to repeat their mistakes because of peer feedback.
6. Students evidence increased motivation to write and to revise.
7. Students develop a better social relationship within the classroom.
(Christensen, 1982)

Clark wrote on the same topic when stating, "The process of peer review has many advantages. It creates a real audience for the work of the student writers. Children begin to write for each other rather than for a single adult. This often inspires them to work more carefully and to take responsibility for the information and mechanics in their writing" (Clark, 1987). When talking about peer editing, Butler stated, "In teaching the skills of editing give them the opportunity to become editors—to work cooperatively in the editing of each other's writings in order to be able to better accept help, and to learn to edit their own writings" (Butler, 1981). The merits of peer editing simply cannot be ignored.

A major problem with self-editing in the past has been that my students did not want to find errors because it meant they had to rewrite their pieces. Rewriting a piece to make corrections was a stage of the writing process that my students dreaded. I saw typing the stories on the computer as a way of eliminating this dread and a way of encouraging good editing. Jacoby agreed when writing, "The student is also willing to make editing changes more often, and usually responds to criticism more positively than ever before because of the ease of the task itself, and the elimination of the total rewriting" (Jacoby, 1984). Jacoby also saw advantages of kids relaxing when writing with computers and explained that the student has the ability to make corrections and changes on the screen before the teacher even sees what has been written by the student and this tends to reduce anxiety about writing. Finally, Jacoby felt that students challenge themselves more when using computers, "Because spelling can easily be corrected, students are more likely to try difficult spelling words because they know they can easily be corrected at a later time without the need to rewrite" (Jacoby, 1984).

In the past, my students just filed their stories in a writing folder when I was finished grading them. To change this, I had my students read their stories to their classmates or other classes. I also had my students create their own Bare Books that they kept and shared with others. These Bare Books were filled with the stories that they had written throughout the school year. Willis confirmed the

merits of writing for an audience when stating, "One good way to motivate students to refine their writing, experts say, is to have them write for real purposes and authentic audiences" (Willis, 1997). Butler brought out the importance of writing for an audience when stating,

> "Purpose and audience are the two guiding lights of the editing stage, because it is a clear perception of what a piece of writing if for, and who is going to read it, that gives an impetus to the writer. Unless there is a sense of purpose in writing, then students and their co-editors cannot function in any real sense. Without purpose and audience, the editing of writing is itself a dummy run" (Butler, 1981).

MacDonald talked about having kids write for an audience when stating, "There is no doubt that this project was an authentic editing activity and my students did see themselves as editors for this booklet and, as a result, read like editors" (MacDonald, 1993). Students need to know that others will be reading their stories if one really wants them to edit well. Overall, my review of literature proved to be productive and gave me many exciting ideas.

Methodology

Research Question

How can I get upper elementary students to better edit their writing pieces?

Research Design

Action Research

Action research is where a person identifies a problem, researches ways to solve the problem, and then tries to solve the problem by implementing interventions discovered in their research. All interventions are research-based and implemented by the researcher in an attempt to eliminate the problem.

Intervention Plan

Baseline data.

Prior to the interventions, a baseline performance was determined in two separate ways. First, I had my students edit a paragraph in the beginning of the school year. The paragraph had twenty

mistakes throughout. I did not give the students any specific directions or show them how I wanted the paragraph to be edited. They independently edited the paragraph and then I collected and scored their work. The results can be found on the chart on page eleven under the heading, "Number Correct First Time." The purpose of this assessment was to see how well my students would edit the paragraph using the grammar skills they had learned in previous years.

The second way of determining my students' baseline data was by having them complete the writing process. I had them create a story about something fun they did over summer vacation. They were directed to write a rough draft, to edit their draft, and then to compose a final copy. They were allowed to type their final copies if they chose to do so. The results can be found on the chart on page eleven and twelve under the heading, "Number of Errors First Time." The purpose of this writing assignment was to see how well my students could edit their own writing using the skills they had acquired in the past.

Interventions.

My interventions began by my providing more direction for my students. Each student was given a proofreading marks sheet (Appendix A) that they could refer to at any time. That way, my students all used the same editing marks whenever they edited a writing piece. When editing, they also had a self-editing checklist (Appendix B) and a peer-editing checklist (Appendix C) that they were required to complete. Each of these checklists focused on specific concepts that the students needed to address when editing their writing. Additionally, my students no longer edited their writing using only a red pen. The students were given a sheet specifying what color to use when editing for certain errors. Color codes can be found in (Appendix D).

I also required my students to peer-edit using their peer-editing checklist (Appendix C) when they were finished self-editing. In both cases, the students used their proofreading marks sheet, and proper colored pens, so that there was uniformity in their editing. When finished with this stage, my students were then required to word process their story on the computer. After printing out this copy

of their story, they were then required to peer-edit their story once again using the peer-editing checklist (Appendix C), proofreading marks sheet (Appendix A), and the proper colored pens. When this stage was completed, the students then edited these stories for a final time on the computer. Students were now at the step where they would print out their final copy. They then read their stories to their audience and eventually added their story to their Bare Book.

Participants

I teach in a large school district of 14,955 students kindergarten through twelfth grade. My elementary school has 568 students with 20.3% of them qualifying for reduced lunches. My individual classroom sizes have always ranged from twenty to twenty-five students throughout my teaching career. The year that this study was conducted, my class consisted of twenty-three students with nineteen of the students having mixed abilities and four students classified as Learning Disabled (LD). The LD students were in my classroom for all subject areas except Communicative Arts. Generally, this class was representative of classes I have had in the past in terms of size, ability, and socioeconomic status.

Data Collection

The data was collected by having my students edit a paragraph with twenty mistakes in it and by having them write a story. I collected this data prior to the interventions and six weeks after implementing the interventions.

Data Analysis

I scored the data and compared the before and after intervention results by constructing charts. The results on how each of the students did is shown on each chart. (Charts are found on pages eleven and twelve). I then compared the before and after intervention results in order to determine if improvements had in fact been made.

Results of Intervention

At the conclusion of this six-week study, my students edited the original paragraph they had edited at the beginning of the school year for a second time. The results of their editing can be found on the chart on page ten and eleven under the heading, "Number Correct Second Time."

Student #	# Correct First Time	# Correct Second Time
1	12	18
2	5	9
3	8	11
5	12	14
6	10	13
8	7	17
9	11	11
10	6	13
11	9	14
12	9	13
13	6	9
14	10	16
15	10	14
16	9	14
18	8	14
19	6	11
20	7	13
22	10	15
23	6	12
Mean score:	8.47	13.21

(Note: #4, #7, #17, & #21 were the LD students who did not participate.)

I also had my students write a story on something fun they did over the long teachers' convention weekend. The number of errors that remained in my students' papers after they edited their initial draft can be found on the chart on page eleven under the heading, "Number of Errors Second Time."

Student #	# of Errors First Time	# of Errors Second Time
1	4	1
2	5	5
3	3	2
5	6	5
6	5	4
8	2	1
9	4	1
10	16	3
11	5	1
12	3	3
13	7	4
14	1	4
15	3	0
16	7	3
18	3	2
19	15	5
20	13	4
22	3	1
23	2	2
Mean score:	5.63	2.68

(Note: #4, #7, #17, & #21 were the LD students who did not participate.)

Conclusions of Study

I am extremely pleased with the interventions used in this study and the elimination of DOL and weekly grammar lessons. As a result of checklists, peer-editing, word processing on the computer, and always writing for an authentic audience my students were 23% more accurate editing paragraphs I created and had on average about three less editing errors each in their own stories at the conclusion of the six-week time period. I feel that my students now have more purpose and direction when editing which I attribute to the interventions. Also, as a result of the interventions, I now rarely see my students making editing mistakes on grammatical concepts they very clearly understand. My students are able to edit papers much more accurately. I feel confident that my students will continue to improve with their editing throughout the school year because of the interventions that have been made.

Future Plans

I have developed a clear plan for my students in the area of editing. While it is true that they have made great strides in their editing, there is still some room for improvement. As I examined the data, I have concluded that some editing errors still occur. I attribute this to my students' inability to understand grammatical concepts. Therefore, I intend to incorporate mini-lessons on specific grammar concepts to clear up any confusion about editing. According to Weaver, mini-lessons can be used with students that need individual help. "Mini-lessons may be taught to the whole class, to small groups, or to individuals in one-on-one conferences. Usually mini-lessons are not taught to the whole class unless the teacher has reason to believe that several students might profit immediately" (Weaver, 1996). It would not be necessary to waste the time of the students who already have displayed a clear understanding of the specific grammatical concept.

The other good thing about mini-lessons is that they are very short and to the point. I will not drill my students with a half hour grammar lesson and then have them do practice worksheets. My research has shown that this does not work and it is not an example of a true mini-lesson. "A key feature of mini-lessons is that students are not given follow-up exercises to practice what has been taught" (Weaver, 1996). Students who are struggling with a concept will be given a five-minute mini-lesson to help them understand the concept and then get right back into their writing. Hopefully, this increased understanding will enable them to find those errors in their papers and edit them correctly.

My students have now become much better at editing, and they no longer view editing as a boring chore. Rather, they now view editing as a vital cog in the writing process that they have become good at and enjoy doing. By the end of the school year, I fully expect that my students will be editing with even greater success. As a result of this study, I am no longer burdened by the phrase, "What do I do now, Mr. Mullen? I am all done editing my story." It has been replace by a phrase that I, as a teacher, enjoy hearing a great deal more. The phrase of choice now is, "Mr. Mullen, when do we get to start editing our papers?"

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Appendix A

Proofreading Marks for Editing

Insert a word or words

Delete a word or words

Capitalize

Use a lower case letter

Add a punctuation mark

Add an apostrophe

Check spelling

Add quotation marks

Indent a paragraph

(Cox, 2002)

Appendix B

Name _____ Date _____

Title of Piece _____

Self-Editing Checklist

___ 1. Each sentence begins with a capital letter.

___ 2. Names of people and places are capitalized.

___ 3. Each sentence ends with a (.), (?), or (!).

___ 4. I have used (") to show when someone is talking.

___ 5. Each new paragraph is indented.

___ 6. I have corrected all misspelled words.

___ 7. I have chosen the words that best describe what I want to say.

___ 8. I have reread my writing and checked it.

(Cox, 2002)

Appendix C

Peer-Editing Checklist

Name _____ Date _____

Reader's Name _____

Title of Piece _____

1. Does each paragraph have one main idea? _____
2. Are all of the sentences in each paragraph related to the main idea? _____
3. Are all of the paragraphs indented? _____
4. Do the sentences have variety? _____
5. Does each sentence begin with a capital letter? _____
6. Does each sentence end with a period, a question mark, or an exclamation mark? _____
7. Are all the names and proper nouns capitalized? _____
8. Are quotation marks used to show when someone is talking? _____
9. Are all of the words spelled correctly? _____
10. Could it be improved in any way? _____

(Cox, 2002)

Appendix D

Purple Pen

Use this pen to add any punctuation marks you may have missed. Be sure you have end marks after each sentence. (.!?) Also, check to be sure you have added commas where you need them.

Blue Pen

Use this pen to circle any words you think are spelled wrong. If you know how to spell the words, write them correctly above the circled word.

Green Pen

Use this pen to add descriptive words to your story.
Example:
Before: The car was driving fast down the street.
After: The red Buick was zipping down South Street.

Orange Pen

Use this pen to correct any mistakes you made in capitalization. Be sure to capitalize the first word of each sentence, words in your title, and all proper nouns. Do not capitalize words that shouldn't be.

(Erin Kohl, Sunset Elementary School)

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